

# Music and Letters

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Review



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## **Additional Information**

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***Ce que la musique fait à l'hypnose: Une relation spectaculaire au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.* By Céline Frigau Manning. Pp. 384. Oeuvres en sociétés. (Les Presses du réel, Dijon, 2021. ISBN 978-2-37896-174-9, €28.)**

A statuesque, seemingly ecstatic figure emerging in pink against a light blue background. The cover image of Céline Frigau Manning's *Ce que la musique fait à l'hypnose* is a colour version of a black-and-white photograph from Émile Magnin's *L'Art et l'hypnose* (Geneva, 1906). The figure's impassioned pose and closed eyes suggest both intimacy and spectacle; the colours make the figure seem to hover between the real, the theatrical, the fantastic, and the subconscious (with overtones of the hallucinatory). This cover image represents many themes and tensions central to Frigau Manning's study of the interconnections between music and hypnosis in the long nineteenth century. Rather than nailing down factual accuracy, she seeks to understand how, according to nineteenth-century practices and experiences, the imbrication of music with hypnosis insists on the need for an 'epistemological flexibility' (p. 14). After all, she declares, 'the phenomenon described under the name hypnosis not only varies from one subject to another, from one context to another, but the way in which the experience is named and described also further reinforces its symbolic complexity' (p. 25). This approach allows her to draw upon an impressively varied array of sources that includes (not exhaustively) medical, journalistic, pedagogical, literary, and testimonial writings. As the basis for networks in which hypnosis

and music form symbolic nodes, these texts are mined for the questions they raise concerning the gaze (medical, theatrical, or other) and the boundaries between the real and the imagined, as well as the conditions of the formation of knowledge and subjectivity.

The book is organized in four chapters, each offering a distinctive thematic perspective. 'Douleur'—an emotion (sorrow) as well as a sensation (pain)—is the focus of the first chapter. The word's double meaning is key to nineteenth-century notions about music's hypnotic potential to treat illnesses of the nervous system that often had a moral dimension. Claims of success with hypnotic treatments of 'douleur' served to dissociate hypnosis from the increasingly discredited treatment systems of magnetism and mesmerism. Yet opinion was divided. This is shown, for instance, in the chapter's discussion of tarantism, an illness reportedly caused by a spider's venom attacking the nervous system and compelling the affected to dance. While some writers suggested that the hypnotic automatism of certain music could cure the patients, others argued it had a further destructive effect. Contemporaries also questioned the existence of the illness, associating it with collective hysteria and folkloristic superstition. These connections between religion, morality, and ecstasy—whether positive or negative—are a recurring theme in this chapter. Another episode tells of a woman who bore the pain of a mastectomy through repeating a religious hymn. The discussion of this episode highlights Frigau Manning's attention not merely **[End Page 126]** to the described event but also to her sources's narrative strategies; in addition to similarities to accounts of mystic ecstasy, she argues that the woman's description of the experience reflects 'the speech of a sleepwalker under the influence of an artificial sleep' (p. 95).

How narratives shape processes of knowledge formation is a principal theme in chapter 2, which focuses on the Aïssaoua, a Muslim brotherhood. Frigau Manning analyses the European fascination with their ritualistic practices that seemingly made participants immune to painful tests, such as eating live scorpions, or piercing one's body. She discusses how observers drew on notions of musical hypnosis not just to explain what they witnessed, but also to make sense of their own (involuntary) attraction to, and even absorption into, these rituals. A dominant framework in this chapter is the colonialist gaze, revealing the exoticizing and civilizing missions that lurk underneath descriptions of these rituals and their music as 'barbaric' and 'primitive' (p. 132). Building on Johannes Fabian's *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley, 2000), Frigau Manning turns the tables on the Europeans whose colonialist gaze was both far from objective and affected by foreign climates, diseases, and exhaustion. She points to 'three levels of disturbance, ontological, epistemological and subjective' that she illuminates through a question: 'where is the unreason ("déraison"): in the world, in the analytical tools of reason, or in the subject itself' (p. 171)?

In the next chapter, Frigau Manning turns from the colonial to the male and medical gaze, examining stories of women 'whose particular nervous disposition exposes them to the effects of hypnosis as well as music' (p. 176). The chapter largely divides into two parts.

The first discusses examples of musical hallucination, in which narrators were intrigued by music's ability to alter the state and musical skills of the somnambulistic subject—an alteration that became completely undone when waking up. She also shows how women are staged: overtaken (and at times destroyed) by their afflictions, they become spectacles for the consumption of onlookers. Unsurprisingly, the focus on women, nervous illnesses, and spectacle leads in the second part to an elaborate discussion of hysteria—probably one of the most researched medical diagnoses of the nineteenth century. Interrogating its intersections with hypnosis offers new insights into the manifold ways music is treated in such texts. Frigau Manning demonstrates how doctors, like Jean-Martin Charcot, play their medical subjects like musical instruments, while others understand the patients' musical activities as symptoms of their diseases. Questions around music's erotic potential in this chapter lead to a consideration (invoked earlier in the book) of music's ambivalent status in the nineteenth century as both a healing and pathologizing entity.

The aesthetic dimensions of hypnotic experiments, while briefly touched on in the preceding chapters, are at the core of the final chapter. It focuses on the 'scientific-artistic experience' (p. 249)—that is, medical experiments involving music performed for audiences—as a genre of spectacle for the curious especially in vogue in the second half of the nineteenth century. Frigau Manning reviews how this genre fuelled a hunger for knowledge about the nature of artistic skill and aesthetic experience. The compelling performances of hypnotized subjects challenged notions about virtuosity, artistry, and automatism. Concerns about spectacle's transforming potential come to the fore in source texts detailing the transitory and impermanent character of the religious ecstasy evoked in these subjects. The final pages of this chapter emphasize how hypnosis serviced the art of performance. Many scholars have shown how nineteenth-century educational singing practices increasingly drew on medical theories and insights. Frigau Manning adds hypnosis to this field of inquiry by introducing the example of Victor Maurel. The latter used hypnosis on the one hand to understand certain dramatic characters (e.g. Othello's alienation as a consequence of being hypnotized by Iago), and on the other to improve a singer's acting skills. Emulating the lived experience of hypnosis, acting was to be 'a work of transformation' (p. 325) in which emotions and experiences are internalized to identify with characters in an embodied manner, rather than purely from an external, intellectual perspective.

Throughout these four chapters, Frigau Manning takes us on an elaborate tour of the places where hypnosis and music cross paths in nineteenth-century writings. She regularly pauses at one of those crossings to provide ample quotations of a particular source. The source's content, narrative strategies, and intertextual connections are then subjected to a careful and multifaceted analysis. Unsatisfied with simple answers, she interrogates their contradictions, ambivalences, and underlying ideological frameworks. In the process, she is not afraid to leave questions unanswered. An important one concerns the exact role that music plays in experiments with hypnosis. Did music contribute to hypnosis's transformational process (whether in a positive or negative manner), or was music merely

a side-product, with little bearing on the hypnotized subject? Was music used as a diagnostic tool, or did it serve [End Page 127] the spectacle and its viewer's gaze? Dichotomies, however, might be misleading, as music was often multifunctional. And, in many cases, the causal connection between music, hypnosis, and the transformation of the subject is undefined, and thus open for interpretation.

This does not keep Frigau Manning from persistently asking questions concerning musical repertory. While she is eager to identify the music linked to hypnosis and its staging, for nineteenth-century writers specifying musical pieces seems not to have been a priority. Frustratingly vague, period authors typically provided either no description, or mentioned just a few instruments, or some general musical characteristics. Nevertheless, Frigau Manning's diligent enquiries lead to a surprisingly wide range of genres: from folk dances such as the tarantella to religious recitations; from popular song such as the *Marseillaise* to piano pieces by Edvard Grieg; and, of course, to a multitude of operatic excerpts. Her discussions also highlight that 'what music does to hypnosis'—the title of her book—is not to be subsumed under a single heading. Not only was the impact of hypnosis thought to be possibly negative or positive, but the powers of hypnosis and music came to be conflated. For instance, the *Marseillaise*, was held to 'translate' hypnotically into its music national emotions and expressions (p. 288), while Grieg's *Erotikk* caused neurosis by allowing the patient to touch the piano (p. 243–4). As these examples show, concepts tied to hypnosis are addressed with epistemological flexibility, while the breadth of what constitutes music, which spans music-making, imagined music, and sound generally, assumes an ontological flexibility.

Employing such flexibility poses some challenges: for instance, it creates a seemingly limitless network of possible discursive connections. Hypnosis is linked to phenomena such as somnambulism, ecstasy, hallucinations, hysteria. And while the focus lies on French sources—probably due to the importance of the Salpêtrière and Nancy Schools in scholarship on nineteenth-century medicine—Italian and English sources are also taken into consideration. At times, the book could have benefitted from a more explicit rationalization of its boundaries. For instance, it is not entirely clear why German sources were not included; after all, there was a prolific medical exchange with France in the nineteenth century. Moreover, a review of the scale of the reception and dissemination of the sources under discussion could have helped to establish how omnipresent the fascination for hypnosis was in this period.

Still, Céline Frigau Manning's book is an impressive achievement that offers a kaleidoscope of views on music's little-researched associations with hypnosis. She not only adds to the literature on hypnosis's interaction with other media, but also breaks new ground for studies on nineteenth-century notions of spectacle, aesthetics, and artistic genius. Because of her multifaceted approach, *Ce que fait la musique à l'hypnose* is of interest not just to musicologists, but also to scholars of literature and the history of science and medicine.

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